

## Political Practice and Its Implication on Folk Art Marginalization (Case Study of Wayang Orang/ Human Puppet Ngesti Pandhowo)

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### Abstract

The government, political practice, both reflected in the government, politics, policies and the attitude of the public figure, influences the existence of folk art that is overshadowed by changes as the results of modernization and industrialization. The aim of this research is to find out the marginalization of folk art because of political practice. This research was done using a qualitative approach while the subject of this research was Ngesti Pandhawa Human Puppet Group. The result of this research showed that folk art could be marginalized because of the influence of the changes in economic and politic that was formulated inside the modernization waves and technology development that offered new values. The attention of the government on the existence of folk art was still being questioned because of politic budget. The budget for art was extremely small compared to the budget for sport. The existence of folk art depended on the favor and interest of the local leaders, especially political interest.

**Keywords:** political practice; folk art; marginalization; Ngesti Pandhowo

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### INTRODUCTION

Folk art can attract the interest of the public, if only the government also participates in it. Amidst the bitter news about the marginalization of folk art in 2012, the Governor of Central Java commented on Jathilan Art, "Jaran Keping performance is the ugliest art in the world, it is so embarrassing that the mayor of Magelang presents this performance in this event" said Bibit Waluyo in his opening speech for The 14<sup>th</sup> Merapi and Borobudur Senior's Amateur Golf Tournament Competing Hamengku Buwono X Cup at Borobudur International Golf and Country Club Magelang, Sunday, September 9, 2012 (Kom-

pas.com, 9 September 2012). At the event, kuda kepeng performance was presented by Jathilan Art Group "Kartika Harapan" from Rojowinangun, Magelang.

The statement then caused pro and contra, but it also made Jathilan performance to grow and develop in Kedu area. Getting a big attention, Jathilan, a dance using a bamboo horse as the property, is a Javanese traditional dance themed a warrior dance that describes a horseman troops that was involved in supporting Prince Diponegoro's insurrection against Netherlands. The Governor Bibit Waluyo who represented the government hadn't seen the meaning of Jathilan performance for the local people especially the people

in Magelang. Irianto (2016) stated about the meaning and message inside Jatilan performance. Jatilan performance contains significant social values of the people such as mutual cooperation, helping each other by seeing a problem as the problem together. In education world, kuda kepang tradition can be used as an expression and creation learning media at school (Ambarwangi, 2014).

Along with the pro and contra on the Central Java Governor's statement, appears a news on the media about the fall of folk art. "The folk art is dying, for example, classical gambang kromong from Betawi losses its stage and audiences. Whereas, it is the fondation of culture. the extinction of the folk art is the extinction of our culture". It was also stated on Kompas, "Folk art is getting fragile and dying", Sunday, September 30, 2012.

According to Kompas, the tragedy on folk art did not only happen in Betawi, the same tragedy happened on the case of Kubro Siswo in Mendut, Magelang, Central Java. When Bentara Budaya gave awards to the local artists by regarding them using the term "the marginalized artists". They did not receive a lot of attention from the people and the policy maker, also had been marginalised from the social realization and economic. The term marginalised used by Bentara Budaya (*Gatra*, 17 October 2012) does not only referred to those who is economically poor because their art works were under appreciated, but also to those whose art works were not popular in wider forum.

The fall of folk art or traditional art was easily found on the case of puppet, ketoprak, and human puppet in Central Java, or Ludruk and Reyog in East Java. It could be seen from the infrequent performance in the middle of the society when they held a wedding ceremony, circumcision ceremony, ect. Ketoprak tobong and human puppet were rarely performed anymore.

Dirjo Wiyono from Agung Budiaji group Yogyakarta (*Suara Merdeka*, 5 October 2012) supported that nowadays the frequency of *Ketoprak* performance is de-

teriorating. He experienced the golden era of ketoprak between 1984-1995 when there were many performances of ketoprak, there could be three orders in three different places a night. Now, it decreases to 4-5 times a month.

Besides, as the effect of the changes in the society is not only because of the influence of modernization and technology, but part of it was also influenced by the politic and policy direction about art. As mentioned by Kayam (1981, p. 17), art as a part of culture has to face open challenges that is widely opened so that foreign art elements are able to invade both through economic and politic and in the end overshadowed the art existed in the middle of the society. Meanwhile, the government politic and policy also does not favor the protection of traditional art so it increases the fall of folk art.

The gap between goals to bulid a tough folk art and the fall of the folk art raised questions that became the main point of this research. The gaps are, first, the gap between the role of the government and the society in providing facilities for folk art. Second, the gap between the maintainance policy and facilities provision for art field compared to other fields, for instance, if it is compared to sport field. Third, how dominant is the influence of that art politic compared to the influence of the technology and modernization in the case of folk art marginalization. Fourth, what is the role of political party that reperesents the people's aspiration in influencing the government policy practice in protecting and developing folk art

The marginalization process of folk art could be the result of social, culture, economic, politic changes or the development of technology, especially information technology. However, this research focused on the political role of the decision maker such as government, public figure, politic institution, and parlement institution. The problem of this research was the institution marginalization process of folk art.

Some researches on this topic that had been done before potrayed the chan-

ging process of the traditional art existence. In the research done by Masyhuril (2008) entitled "Perubahan Apresiasi Masyarakat Terhadap Kesenian Tradisional (Studi Kasus Kesenian Kubrosiswo di Dusun Suro-wangsan Margorejo Tempel Sleman 1972-2008)", one of the conclusions derived was that in entertainment world, traditional art failed to compete with modern art. Besides, having general genre, modern art was easier to understand because it suited the taste of the market. It was different to the traditional art that was simple and monotonous (people's tradition) or if it came from the royal tradition (classic), it seemed complicated and difficult to be understood by the audience. Because of this competition, besides publication, the main demand of the competitor was creativity. These two things became the obstacle for showing the existence of the traditional art

The researches related to human puppet Ngesti Pandhowo were quite a few. One of them was a research titled "Upaya Inovasi Bentuk Penyajian Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandawa Semarang dan Pengaruhnya Bagi Penonton (2001)" written by Subiarti, Mustikawati (2002) titled "Persepsi Pemain Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandawa Semarang dengan Kehadiran Pemain Luar, Pengambilan Keputusan Pemain Wanita Wayang Orang terhadap Keputusan menjadi Seniman (Studi Kasus Peran Ganda Pemain Wanita Wayang Orang)" written by Ratih (2000), and "Pola Pewarisan Pemain Wanita Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandawa Semarang" written by Anik Purwati (2005). Sainah also had ever written a research titled "Tokoh dan Fungsi Punakawan dalam Pertunjukan Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandawa di Semarang" in 2010. Sainah explained about Punakawan that was studied from its movement, text, make up and costume of Ngesti Pandhawa human puppet at Semarang. The function of Punakawan in a performance of Ngesti Pandhawa human puppet was as a nurturing figure (symbolic function), the pointer or media of the story, and entertainer.

The study that showed a close relation between politic and the existence of

traditional art had been done by Sutiyono (2010), in the research entitled "Pertunjukan Wayang Kulit sebagai Media Kampanye Pemilu 1971-1977: Studi tentang Hegemoni Negara terhadap Seni Tradisional", Javanese traditional leather puppet (Surakarta and Yogyakarta Style) that was performed in Central Java, DIY, and East Java was used as the aspect of the research.

Meanwhile, this research focused on the human puppet Ngesti Pandhawa group in Semarang as the subject of the research, not only it discussed about the existence of traditional art, but it also answered the questions on how political practice has a big role in the existence of folk art.

Art is a part of a nation's culture. According to Kuntjaraningrat (1985, p. 2), art is build based on (1) religion system and ceremony; (2) the system and organization of the society; (3) system of knowledge; (4) language; (5) art; (6) the system to earn a living; (7) ecology and equipment system. Those elements are so strong that many people misunderstood that culture is the same as art.

The order of the elements is also the order of the system from the element that is the hardest to the easiest to change. Art is in the fifth order, it is in the category of the element that is easy to change compared to the religion system, the organization of the society, system of knowledge, or language.

On the other hand, Kuntjaraningrat (1985, p. 117), mentioned that Indonesian art such as Bali and Javanese dance has reached the highest level of development so that they have special position. The consequence of the change is the possibility of the decline in quality. Art, according to Bekker (1984, p. 46), is part of culture that processes natural potential using sense and aesthetic approach. That process creates an art as a communication media to its society.

Art as part of culture is born, grown, and developed along with its social environment. Kayam (1981, p. 38) said that art never stand-alone separated from its

society. Art is the expression of cultural creativity. Society as the pillar of the culture gives the chance to create an art work. Society, in this case a community, that create an art work claimed it as theirs. This is then the beginning of the folk art or specifically folk song, folk dance, etc.

Sedyawati (2006, p. 25) differentiate between art as an independent element in cultural system and art as a part of other elements such as religion element. As an independent element, art is shaped by (1) values and concepts devices that are the pointer for all the artful activities (both in creating and enjoying); (2) the artist, start from the designer, the presenter, the advisor (the producer included), and the audience; (3) patterned and systematic action related to art such as practicing, creating, publishing, etc; (4) objects related to process of creating art, both used as media or art work.

The relation between art and its society, according to Slamet Gundono (*Suara Merdeka*, 14 October 2012), can be seen through the spirit of the folk art. Folk art that grows in coastal area will describe the coastal culture, so does the folk art in the mountainous area. The consequence of the folk art cannot be separated from the role of its society, both as the connoisseur and the protector of the folk art, for example by conserving art tradition. The role of public figure in the society as the protector of the art will also very crucial.

Particularly for folk art, the peak of the aesthetic is not the main goal, even though moral value still becomes the orientation. Art as communication media and social expression. Art is the symbol of solidarity and social need. Therefore, art can only exist because of social willingness. To maintain the folk art, realization of the importance of the tradition is needed so that the art can be the media to communicate and be creative. The character of the society is reflected in the movement, music, and fashion style.

To get a clear vision on the chance of the culture field, particularly art, cannot be separated from the social dynamic of its

society, as stated in Structural Functionalism Theory coined by Talcott Parsons. According to Nasikun (2012, p. 13), a society has to be viewed as a system than a correlated parts. Therefore, the relationship of influence-influencing between one part to another is dualism and mutualism.

The political condition in Orde Baru Era or the New Order Era that is known as the authoritarian of Soeharto era, was explained by Schwarz (1999, p. 1) as, *"during three decades of authoritarian rule, Soeharto succeeded in restoring political stability to Indonesia and putting in place the policies that change Indonesia from economic basket case to a thriving, developmental success story"*. In this kind of political setting, the influence of patronage is very central, including art field.

Based on the interest of political party, a visible position that can be understood by the society is needed. Political positioning concept, according to Firmanzah (2008, p. 165), is that a party needs to create products and images to differentiate itself to other party. Each parties must try to be dominant in controlling the thought of the society. As a result the party will be remembered, become the reference, and be the choice of the society.

The role of political, at least the role of the government in nurturing the folk art will be stated by Umar Kayam. Regarding the case of human puppet of Sriwedari Solo, Kayam (2002, p. 1961) stated that as a package of art, Sudha human puppet has been proved as a good art by presenting good materials, and is still be a potential entertainment for its society. It will rely on how the maintainer, the advisor, the government wrapped the art work cleverly and sensitively suited the taste of the audience.

This research focused on the role of political subsystem, in this case government, in maintaining and protecting the existence of folk art because of modernization and technology development. As mentioned by Sudikan (2001, p. 68) and some previous researches, this research aimed to answer some questions such as



(1) how a nation, government, manages the politic and the policies to strengthen the existence of folk art, (2) how the political policies of the local government protect folk art from the impact of modernization and technology development.

## METHOD

This research, just like any other social science research, was a qualitative research. It did not involve numbers and statistics. According to Rohidi (2011, p. 4) because art must be placed completely in the circle of society so this research used qualitative approach.

The secondary data were collected through literature study while primary data were collected through interview and participatory observation. Another source of the data were Ngesti Pandhawa Human Puppet Group, Central Java and Semarang local government, both regarding the opinion and the policies related to art in general and Ngesti Pandhawa in particular. The data were analyzed using interactive model of Miles dan Huberman (1984) that starts from the process of collecting data, reducing data, and drawing conclusion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Ngesti Pandhawa as Social, Cultural, and Economic Institution

Several phenomena regarding folk art happened all over Indonesia can be seen clearly through the case of Ngesti Pandhawa Human Puppet in Semarang. As a picture of folk art, Ngesti Pandahawa is widely known, it even became the icon of art in Semarang and represented Central Java or Indonesia. In its golden era, according to Muhammad (2007, p. 38), Ngesti Pandhawa had been widely known by foreign tourist from all over the world.

Ngesti Pandhawa first came to Semarang in 1952, it was not the first puppet group in Semarang. In 1935, there was Sri Wanito Human Puppet Group which developed rapidly and in 1952, even owned

a building in Dr. Cipto Street. But in 1995, it went bankrupt, the member left and the building was broken down.

Ngesti Pandhawa became more established in 1959, when the performance was recorded by Romaco. The recording occur from 1960's until 1970's. That era, under Sastrosabdho's leadership, was Ngesti Pandhowo golden era. They did not only deliver exceptional performance in drama dance or dance but the backsound and its *gending-gendingan* was also well made by Ki Nartosabdho. Even the stage technique was also well managed, for example, how they picture a flying Gatotkaca, transform Kresna into a giant, or make other character disappear, etc.

The golden age of Ngesti Pandhowo started to fade when the founder Sastrosabdho died on Januari 8, 1966. It got even worse in 1980's when the other founder Sastrosudirdjo died on July 9, 1984, and Nartosabdho in October 7, 1985.

Besides internal changing of Ngesti Pandahwa, there was also social changing that pushed the art of Ngesti Pandhawa aside because its strategic performing location was replaced as business center such as malls and hotels. Even though, they were forced to move from their buliding in 1997, Semarang Local Goverment helped the member of Ngesti Pandhawa to find another building to perform and housing complex for the member.

According to Cicuk Sastrosudirdjo (Portal Semarang, 16 December 2011), the leader of Ngesti Pandhawa, because they were relocated, the members of Ngesti Pandhawa were scattered. Half of them lived in Arya Mukti Area, Bandung Bondowoso Apartment, while the rest of the members lived in housing complex.

However, the members of Ngesti Pandhawa did not give up to choose human puppet as their choice of art. Ngesti still exists, having 85 members and fixed performing schedule every weekend at Taman Budaya Raden Saleh (TBRs). By purchasing a ticket for IDR 10,000, the audience can enjoy Ngesti Pandhawa Performance for 2 to 4 hours.

Even though, Ngesti Pandhawa only performs once a week, they can still use the government's building in Taman Budaya Raden Saleh Complex at Sriwijaya Street, Semarang. Besides that, they are also funded by APBD of Semarang.

### **The Need of Protection on The Existance of Art Tradition**

A nation must build its cultural politic based on various cultural elements including the variety of the folk art from all over Indonesia (Kayam, 1981, p. 45). Dahana (2012) mentioned that our culture will be stagnant even degraded if the folk art both modern of contemporary as the foundation of the art is dying. If the local art is marginalized, the producer of art will be extinct.

Systematically, the effort to interpret cultural values including local culture, inside the amandement, have a strong foundation in the amadement of UUD 1945. The government has the responsibility to develop the natioal art of Indonesia as stated in Article 32 of UUD 1945: "*Pemerintah memajukan kebudayaan nasional Indonesia.*". After the amandement, the article was divided in two verses that states: "(1) *Negara memajukan kebudayaan nasional Indonesia di tengah peradaban dunia dengan menjamin kebebasan masyarakat dalam memelihara dan mengembangkan nilai-nilai budayanya;* (2) *Negara menghormati dan memelihara bahasa daerah sebagai kekayaan budaya nasional* (Sadono, 2011)". The article implied the government's responsibility to pay attention on the development of the national culture.

The constitution has pointed out the politic of culture including art as the responsibility of the government and the right of the society. The government policy combined with the society's creativity, aspiration, concern, and resolve will determine the existance and development of folk art. If seen from the existing condition, including the Malaysia's claim on Reog Ponorogo and Tor-tor dance can be the illustration of the nation political practice, both done by the government and the society who are

ignorant when it comes to art so that folk art is becoming more marginalized.

Ngesti Pandhawa is lucky because from the beginning they got the support from the Mayor of Semarang Hadisubeno Sastrowerdojo who was also, at that time, the leader of Nasional Indonesia Party to use the building of GRIS foundation at Pemuda Street, Semarang. In 1945, Ngesti Pandhawa permanently performed at GRIS building that was renovated to meet the need of the performance. The finest moment of the group was when President Soekarno visited Semarang and watched Ngesti Pandhawa performance and then invited them to perform at *Istana Negara*. They even got "Wijaya Kusuma" award from the government, based on government policy 26/1960, that was given on August 17, 1962. However, it raised a question, can the president's kindness at that time be considered as the government's attention on the art tradition especially human puppet? Is the attention of the president and the mayor enough to maintain the existance of art tradtion especially Ngesti Pandhawa human puppet? It can be a mere kind gesture of the president by giving a place and award as the genuine expression and appreciation from a president. Though, it can also be the implementation of Bung Karno's politic regarding culture that at time become the application of his politic attitude as the president who led a nation with variety of cultures as well as became the answer regarding western culture that may become a threat to the local culture.

It can be seen that in his reign, Soekarno implied his politic regarding culture based on the diferences of Indonesia (*kebinekaan Indonesia*) that must be maintained. It was proven by some of the art tradition that were greatly appereciated and invited by Soekarno to perform at *Istana*.

### **Politic Practice and Its Implication on Art (Ngesti Pandhowo Group)**

The role of the nation, especially the government, in managing art, particularly folk art, can be seen from the politic regar-

ding the budget. Wisanggeni (2012) stated that art cannot be controlled only by the help of APBD (local government budget). She stated that the collapse of folk art is at least because of two things. First, the minimum attention from the government and the society that is reluctant in watching art performances anymore. Second, the attention of the government is not as big as the government's attention toward sport, it can be seen from the amount of the budget given to the sport area. Referring to the case of Pati Regency, the development art cannot only be supported by the small amount of the government's budget. Pati Art Board only gets 50 million rupiahs every year.

Nationally, the attention on the culture including art is concerning. Dahana (2013) said that the budget for culture in 2012 is 600 billion rupiah that is only 0.5 percent given by Education And Culture Department not from APBD. It seems like the government does not do anything regarding culture. Thus, the government must be grateful toward the artists in Indonesia that independently create the process, dynamic, and products of culture. Based on this, the lack of the government's attention in developing and maintaining art tradition can be seen.

The role of the society and government in maintaining or developing folk art is shown by Sedyawati (1981, p. 55). Besides artist and the society as the supporter of its existence and development, the development of folk art is also determined by the leader of the government, religion, and the parties that give sponsor, etc. The involvement of the the government's officials, such as president, king, governor, regent, etc can associate the product of art to prestige and luxury. Therefore those leaders can promote new art. In the context of local government, Budiardjo (2012) stated that the government must have personal interest towards art so that he can say loudly "if the governor dosen't care with art, then he is uncivilized.". this statement is the expression of concern from the observer of art tradition that is concerned toward the critical future of the art traditions.

It is undeniable as Clark (1997) states that there is the complex relationship between art and politics, showing how works of art can have a political purpose, and explores the ways in which art styles become associated with political systems. As well as state propaganda, discusses the protest art of Marxism, pacifism, feminism and anti-colonialism.

Hariadi Saptono, Executive Director of Bentara Budaya (2012), discussed about the minimum infrastructure in accomodating art nowadays, the condition is different from the condition in *Orde Lama* when President Soekarno gave special attention to art and culture. In *Orde Lama* era, art was used by the political party as a tool to reach the society. "So there was an infrastructure to the bottom and also maintenance."

The responsibility of the government in facilitating folk art is also reflected from the statement of the the professor of Indonesia Art Institute Surakarta, Rahayu Supanggah. Supanggah (2012) stated that the existance of the artist is underestimated. Because of that the government must give the opportunity, appreciation, not only in the form of money but also appreciation. Moreover, the government must help the artist to perform at a good and strategic place. The role of the government is needed because mostly traditional artists have low education background and are vulnerable in facing industrilization and modernization.

It is also portrayed through the case of Ngesti Pandhawa marginalization, they were cast out from a highly valuable land and the government was also "disinclined" in defending the right to live in prosperity and strategic place. The government economic, politic is more inclined to global economic law than formal law that would grant victory regarding the land dispute that was previously occupied by Ngesti Pandhawa Group for years. Unfortunately, this was only done halfway. The Puppet marginalized people also could be explored its existence, for example in the field of tourism. The existence of this group can be a work of art tourism as said by Adler

(1989). Semarang has been often the arrival of cruise ships from around the world is proof that Semarang very attractive for foreign tourists.

The condition of this group marginalization was worsened by the degradation of local culture that was replaced with globalized and capitalist culture of its society. Capitalist culture is the enemy of local culture that contains solidarity value. As a result, the supporter of local culture will also be marginalized. If they are more inclined on the business strategic area, the supporter of local culture will also die. A culture, including art tradition will die if its society does not embroider art as a part of their life, even only as entertainment (Ambarwangi & Suharto, 2014, p. 41).

## CONCLUSION

The existence and growth of folk art can be facilitated by government's politics and policy, through the public official and budget policy, especially the budget of local government, both province and city government. The attention of the government toward the existence of folk art is still being questioned because the existence of budget policy. The budget for art is extremely small than the budget for sport.

Local government is the extension of the orientation and perspective of the central government. The existence of the folk art depends on the favor and interest of the local government especially political interest. Local government by the existence of local autonomy focused only on the improvement of infrastructure and industrialization and as a result marginalized the development of the culture.

The existence of the art tradition like human puppet is greatly influenced by global culture that influences the life style and point of view of its society. However, the role of the government can lead the flow of globalization by marginalizing or changing the life system of art community in embroidering art tradition as a part of their life because of economic factor. Whereas, art tradition can build civilization

that is based on local culture.

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